**The Grandfather Clause (1898–1915), from Blackpast.org**

**Vocabulary to know before you read:**

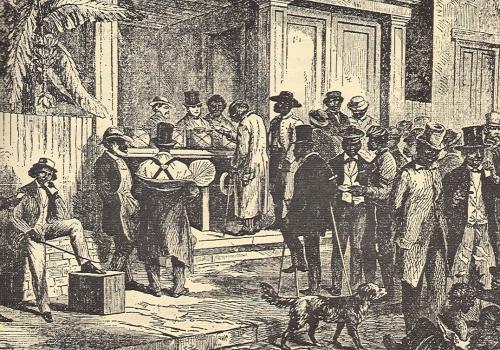
**Clause: a law or part of a law**

**Negate: to deny, to cause to be ineffective**

**Franchise: the power to vote**

**Null and void: having no force, having no power**

*Freedmen Voting, South Carolina (1868)*

The Grandfather Clause was enacted by seven southern states during and after the reconstruction era to prevent freedmen from voting. The clause, designed to negate the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which allowed black men to vote, significantly reduced African American political participation well into the 20th Century.

Starting in Louisiana in 1898 and working its way into laws and constitutions in seven other states by 1910, the Grandfather Clause stated that all men or lineal descendants of men who were voters before 1867 did not have to meet the educational, property, or tax requirements for voting then in existence. This effectively allowed all white males to vote while denying the franchise to black men and other men of color.  The Grandfather Clause, with its voting denial, became the centerpiece of a much larger system of discrimination and racial segregation.   
  
The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), newly formed in 1909, mounted the first legal challenge to the Grandfather Clause.  It filed suit in *Guinn v. United States*, a case which reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1915.  The Court ruled that Grandfather Clauses in Maryland and Oklahoma were null and void because they violated the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

**Sources:**  
Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Shawn Leigh Alexander. “The Afro-American Council and its Challenge of Louisiana’s Grandfather Clause” in Chris Green, Rachel Rubin and James Edward Smethurst, eds., *Radicalism in the South since Reconstruction*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

**Questions: answer these on a separate sheet of paper or neatly on the back of this page in complete sentences.**

1. What was the purpose of the 15th Amendment?
2. In your own words, what was the Grandfather Clause? Why do you think it spread to several southern states?
3. What happened that made the Grandfather Clause *null and void*?
4. Note that there used to be a Grandfather Clause in Maryland. In your opinion, does segregation or discrimination still exist in Maryland? Explain your reasoning.